
Post Colonialism And Political Resistance In *Lagaan: Once Upon A Time In India*¹ Arjun P Kumar, ² Gopikrishnan S, ³ Arun S

1. P.G. Student, 2. P.G Student 3. Assistant Professor

Department of English, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Amrita puri Campus, India

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Abstract: Using the movie *Lagaan* as a case in point, the paper examines the post-colonial and political resistance in the 19th century. *Lagaan* is a Bollywood movie released in 2001 and is directed by Ashutosh Gowariker. The fictional story is set in a village in India and it explores the struggles faced by the citizens to earn their rights. Taking in account of the movie, the paper analyses the socio-political scenario of the country.**Keywords:** Post Colonialism, Political resistance, *Lagaan*

Analysis:

“Iss aetihask jeet ke baad bhi itihask main Bhuvan ka naam kahi kho gaya” (Even after the historical win, Bhuvan lost his identity in the history of struggle) - *Lagaan*

Indian film industry which is a collective formation of cinemas from various languages has evolved as a major form of entertainment. But as time passed, it has become a source of voice for the voiceless. The Indian directors chose the medium to speak about the socio-political background of the country. Though majority of the mass enjoyed a commercial treatment, there has always been a want for experiments. In the current scenario, movie critics play a major role in analysing the soul of the movie. The cinephile dig deep through the aesthetic sense and even bring in light the technology involved. In the early 2000's there was a cultural resetting. Indian directors produced myriad genres that can evoke feelings and nostalgia of the past. As a result, movies such as *Lagaan* made a collective impact. Several such movies that dealt with the socio-political scenario appeared on the screen, but the fictional treatment of an eventful history of India made it as a one-of-a-kind movie.

Ashutosh Gowariker's *Lagaan: Once Upon a Time in India* (2001) is an Indian Hindi language epic musical sports film. Aamir Khan engages both as an actor and producer in the movie. The other supporting actors include debutant Gracy Singh and British actors Rachel Shelley and Paul Blackthorne. During the release, Sunny Deol's movie was also released, so this resulted in a clash. The movie was able to move both audience and the critics. As a result, the movie won many national and international acclaims and awards. This was indeed a great achievement for Indian film industry. Filmed in Bhuj, a small village in Gujarat, the movie was the first production venture of Amir Khan production. The total budget of the movie was estimated as 5.32 million dollars.

R. Chopra's directional venture *Naya Daur* which was released on 1957 was the inspiration behind the movie. It was under the same genre. It was written by Akhtar Mirza and Kamil Rashid. The main actors include Dilip Kumar, Vyjayanthimala and Ajit Khan. Director Ashutosh Gowariker has expressed that it was somewhat a difficult task to make the movie. Gowariker contacted Amir, who accepted the task to take part after listening to the entire script. Aamir at the beginning was not interested in a sport related film, but was very moved upon hearing the complete script. Even having Aamir Khan by his side, Ashutosh had great difficulty in getting production help. Producers who were amused in the script had budget issues as they did not have a capacity for huge investment. The act is risky too. They also wanted script alterations. Finally, Aamir agreed to the suggestion that the production will be handled by him. Aamir approved this by saying that he trusted the director's idea of the film. He is also pleased to join the venture and begin his journey as a producer. His fascination for the script and the story also made him closer to the movie. The film was co-produced by Jhamu Sughand because he was fascinated by how emotional and patriotic the story was.

At the beginning of production, Nitin Chandrakant Desai was the first one to join the team. He was the art director of the movie and played an important role in searching the set for shoot. To find a village that resembles the fictional place Champaner was a difficult task. In late 1998, they found a village near Bhuj in Gujarat. The language used was Avadhi which was further diluted so that the viewers can easily understand it.

The movie gives a glimpse of the subalterns and their role in the society which throws light upon the various cultural background of India back. The Subalterns mentioned in the Gramsci's terminology denote as „inferior rank“, but Ranajit Guha elaborated the term to involve all oppressed groups—peasantry, working class, untouchables, females and the other classes in the society.

Between the world of politics on the one hand and the economic processes of the capitalist transformation on the other, there is the kind of mental space within which the social forms of existence and consciousness of the people are all their own—strong and enduring in their own right and therefore free of manipulations by the dominant groups.

The paper delivers an insight to the post-colonial and political resistance portrayed in the movie *Lagaan*. Before digging the roots of the film, it is important to have a glance at the historical and political background of India. The Britishers set foot in Indian soil for trade and later they colonised the entire country. The British Raj rule starts from 1858 to 1957. They looted the wealth and prosperity of our nation and then made us enslaved. They levied taxes and other unjust practices. Though several battles were fought between the kings and the Britishers, none of them resulted in victory due to the modern weapons used by them. To resist them and to win back the mother land Indians used various propagandas. With the rise of many political leaders and freedom fighters, Indians were able to raise the voice and finally earn victory. But many lives perished in the long run. *Lagaan* is a recollection of the past history of India. Set in a village area inhibited with locales, they play their part by resisting the taxes imposed by the Britishers by challenging them in a game of Cricket. Though this story is a fictional setting it was never an alien concept. Looking back into the history of India we are able to trace many villagers such as Bhuvan who has resisted the unjust ways of Britishers. These unsung heroes around the nation helped in achieving the freedom. With such incidents happening around the country, Britishers realized that they can no longer rule them and as a result they decided to withdraw the forces. In the movie, the colonizers are depicted as the centre or the super power and the colonized is represented as the other. It gives the colonized the insight that they are inferior to the colonizer. England was one of the major global force during colonization in India, and this is very visible in the film. For example, in the movie the antagonist, Captain Russell, is the decision maker and the villagers have no other choice than to follow them.

Set in the village of Champaner in August 1893, the farmers are in great dismay as the crops failed due to the delayed monsoon. In addition to the misery, they are forced to pay a double tax or *lagaan*. To resolve the case, they visit their King Raja Puran Singh but he was engaged in a game of cricket with British officials. When all of them awaits, Bhuvan mocks the game which infuriates the officials. A proud officer Russell challenges Bhuvan that if they win the game, they will be exempted from the taxes for three years. Bhuvan takes up the challenge. Back in the village, everyone is angry at Bhuvan for making such a rash decision. As none of them are aware of the game they will face great difficulties in the future. Bhuvan convinced at his decision enlist support from some villagers. In order to achieve the mission, he started to observe the game from afar. Russell's sister, who noticed them decided to help them by explaining the game. Soon, everyone hears about the news and joins them. But the journey was not an easy task. Lakha, a villager conspires against Bhuvan. Lakha has an eye for Gauri who is interested in Bhuvan. Later when the match starts, Bhuvan's team is far away from the victory as Lakha plays as the informer. But the next day, Lakha transforms himself and helps the team to win. Though the second day was a rough play, Bhuvan was able to win the match. After a few days the officers leave the village as the cantonment is disbanded. Though Elizabeth, Russell's sister has an interest for Bhuvan she leaves the village whole heartedly knowing that Bhuvan is in love with Gauri. She is also delighted that the villagers need not pay the tax and she has been a helping hand for a fair play.

Postcolonialism in literature voices the aftermath of colonisation in a country, especially concentrates on the political and cultural independence of formerly subjugated people and themes such as colonialism and racialism. In short, Post colonialism commenced from the end of world war II. Post-colonial literature also concentrates on the psychological state of the colonised. Even after being freed from the powers of colonial forces the subjugated people still find themselves inferior. In *Lagaan*, there is a political resistance, a movement with an organised effort from a group of people to resist a power. It can either be a violent or non-violent method. The form diverse according to the period and type of people involved. In the movie, the villagers don't indulge in any violent practises but they resist the political unfairness through a fair play of cricket. They demand justice through a fair playground. Though they are unfamiliar with the do and don'ts of the game, the spirit is untouched. They motivate other fellow villagers to join the cause and resist the imperial powers. In colonial period, it was not only military power but also the materialistic possessions that aided the British forces to oppress the native citizens. In light of this scenario, Indian men who were exposed to the colonial approach resulted in restricting the women folk. But modernity over the period changed the lives of these women and in the post-colonial period, they emerged as nationalist figure who did not blindly imitate the western woman but rather indulged in the building of the nation's progress with her oriental philosophies of spirituality. Here, the differences between the British woman and native woman lies in the very separation of materialism and spiritualism.

In the movie, the sub altern groups resolve the matter with creative resolution. The main character or the hero of the movie chooses cricket as a solution to face the agricultural tax imposed upon him. The plot of the movie doesn't deviate from the cliché of Indian cinema. The hero's journey is well equipped with dramatic incidents and all the other characters working with him for a cause. But the movie never revolves around the hero's master play. Though he is used as a leading figure to further lead the plot, there are other number of characters such as his friends and foes that makes the story a fight against the imperial powers. The movie is always a collective approach. At the beginning of the movie, Bhuvan the protagonist of the movie was called 'Daku' by a British officer. While analysing this incident, it is evident that how the imperial forces treat Indians. They call them names and not even consider them as person. It is always a power play. They show their power and

authority over the others by always degrading them and calling them uncivilised which is the biggest irony. During the Indian independence in 1947, there was about 13 million people in 127 communities who were under surveillance, search and arrest without warrant. They were constantly put in jail without much reasons and were brutally attacked if resisted. Many sources claim that Britishers had an extensive body of belief based on crime and class. Many of the lower-class people were harassed in the process and was labelled as criminals. They get easily agitated if the people raise their voice against them. These traits can be seen in the character of Russell in the movie who challenges the villagers because he knows that it is impossible to win the game. His tone and actions were to mock the fellow villagers. Though they have looted enough from the major provinces of India, they never played a part in resolving the issues faced by the country. The prime aim was to collect maximum income and nothing else. In the movie, the agricultural tax issue is never put into consideration. Instead, they wanted to ignore the situation and make the farmers suffer in silence. In the movie, when the villagers face an issue, they collectively solve them. People from all caste and religion offers a helping hand. Women contribute by motivating the players and conducting spiritual rites.

It is important to note that the British officer of the East India Company has the power and privilege to do so, gives a challenge to the peasant citizens of the country. With their power they could have insulted, arrested or do any other means to shut them. Instead, they chose to give an opportunity to the villagers. The villagers chose not to revolt or create chaos and decided to talk it out with the officials. The villagers have long realised that the officials have power over them and they should choose wise over violence. This incident how colonized the farmers were under the British rule. They weren't being harmed physically but emotionally and mentally. Feeling as an inferior being in their own land is itself a miserable thought.

Also, in the movie, When Bhuvan returns after making the challenge, the villagers get angry with him. They are afraid that they couldn't stand up to them and win a foreign game. In addition to that they will have to pay taxes. This shows the psychological impact that is made by the superior powers upon the Indians. They think that they have to remain silent and follow their rule. Escaping from the trap of these forces is nearly impossible. The organised cricket showcased in the movie is one particular farmer community's response to British rule in India. Cricket nationalism is reproduced as a contrast from nationalist politics and the two are kept separate. Here, cricket is not a means of entertainment or a fun activity. In the eyes of Britishers it can be said so. But for the villagers, it is a game of survival. The Britishers enjoy each and every part of the game but the villagers are in a disturbed mental state. They have so much to lose when compared to the British officials. They try and practise hard to succeed in the game. This shows the desperation and dilemma of the villagers. For a small town in India, a game of cricket wouldn't be an area of interest. They are struggling day and night for their survival and the country's state is not much favourable to them. Hence, putting forward to them the concept of a challenge is irrational and humiliating at the same time.

The villagers were also colonized based on modernity. The Britishers live a life of luxury, using modernised products to make their life easier. On the other hand, the villagers have to work hard to even have the basic needs of their life. They use traditional utensils and methods to do their daily chores. When it comes to the game cricket, the official uses their expensive bats and balls made from excellent materials. The villagers have to make their own materials to practice and use. The extreme differences in lifestyle shows the aftermath of colonisation that led to the deterioration of living conditions in the country. Even the clothes used by Russell sister portrays the British culture. She uses hats and umbrella to beat the scorching heat. She doesn't have much labour to do and spends most of the time lavishly. In the case of Indian women, they are hardworking in nature. They have to walk miles to fetch water. They look after the family needs and are indulged in household activities which are exhausting. They help and support their husbands mentally. They aren't educated as much when compared to the British women nor have a luxurious lifestyle. They are plain and simple, both in character and living. But the modernity was never an excuse for the villagers. Their resistance towards the colonial powers is an example. It is evident that they chose to fight and win the challenges with limited resources and talent. The spirit of unity is their greatest strength and weapon to win the challenge.

The analysis of the film in reference to the social, economic and political condition of the country imply that the imperial forces play a pivotal role in restructuring India. Through the Gandhian principle of Non-violence and other propaganda, the citizens have made an impactful change that later led to many such incidents. The film projects that we have been oppressed and subjugated for a long time that we almost forgot that we had our own voice. We were internally struggling but the fear of being oppressed made us silent. It also shows the class exploitation and bourgeoisie culture. *Lagaan* represents thousands of unsung stories that made a change in resetting the history of India.

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